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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT
AND JUDICIAL TRAINING

REF: STATE 05448

1. (SBU) Post Coup Caveats: This is a response to REFTEL request for information. Our response reflects activities we believe would be useful if political conditions -- i.e. the return of democratic governance -- will allow. In the Post-Coup environment, our engagement must be very limited and limited to narrowly focused CT efforts with immediate impact and/or essential Mauritanian participation in regional CT efforts (i.e. situations where the lack of Mauritanian participation would negate the effectiveness of the regional initiative).

2. (U) Internal and Regional Challenges: The primary challenge to regional security is the continued presence of Al Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) forces, within Mauritania itself. Mauritania's border with Mali, an acknowledged safehaven for AQIM, is extremely porous. The border's remoteness and size, approximately 1,000 miles in length, has historically allowed AQIM forces to travel into Mauritania, conduct operations, and retreat into the relative safety of Mali, all before an appropriate response from Mauritanian security forces can be assembled.

3. (U) While Mauritania does have its share of drug-related arrests involving large shipments of narcotics, Mauritania itself has no indigenous crop of illicit drugs. However, the nation, specifically its eastern coastline, serves as a significant trade route for drug shipments transiting between Europe and greater West Africa. The deficiencies of Mauritanian border security programs and agencies must be addressed by foreign assistance, for there to be any measurable gains in this area.

4. (U) Non-Military Capabilities: Mauritania's non-military security agencies all suffer from the same three issues. Each agency is understaffed, given the current workload, undertrained and very poorly equipped. The majority of police officers show no understanding of basic arrest or interview techniques. The Douanes, a customs force under Ministry of Finance, is critically understaffed and highly prone to solicit bribes. The Gendarmerie Nationale, perhaps the most professional security force within the country, is composed of only around 1500 personnel. When one considers that Gendarme fill the role of a coast guard, border patrol, and provide law enforcement for Mauritania's vast, rural areas, their shortage of manpower becomes apparent. That being said, Mauritanian security forces have shown an ability to apply the most basic principles of investigation, when confronted with urgent issues, such as the presence of known terrorists in major cities. In the past year dozens of terrorism-related arrests have been conducted by members of the Gendarmerie. Additionally, the instructors of prior training courses provided to security forces have all noted the near-universal appreciation and enthusiasm for such classes from their students. The most common issues faced by security forces are:

-- A shortage of vehicles: This is particularly apparent in the Gendarmerie's modest fleet of light pickups, used for border and rural security patrols. Although Gendarme vehicles are typically well-maintained, in comparison with the other

security services, the small numbers make frequent patrols of outlying areas a significant challenge. Border security assets display a complete lack of sophisticated electronic monitoring systems, such as seismic sensors, or surveillance aircraft. This makes the mounted patrolling of border zones of critical importance.

-- Lack of easily-acquired force multipliers, such as night vision scopes, radios, and GPS units: Police officers are rarely seen to carry radios, and there is currently no national radio system for official use. Currently, separate non-military and military forces maintain their own networks with widely varying manufacturers and models of equipment.

-- Low standards of professionalism: Apparent, to some extent, in all of the non-military security services, this lack of professionalism has several root causes. The Mauritanian populace often regard members of uniformed services with a mix of disdain and dismissiveness. Rank and file police officers are frequently ignored when attempting to enforce more common laws, such as traffic regulations. Their ready willingness to accept, and even solicit, bribes contributes heavily to this impression. However, it is apparent that the low pay inherent in these jobs, as well as the frustration stemming from being given a difficult job to do, with none of the tools to do it properly, significantly erodes the esprit de corps of new members of the security services, and all but eliminates the professionalism of many veteran members.

15. (U) Specific Training Requirements

-- Police: Mauritanian police officers universally need basic training in investigative process, evidence handling, arrest techniques, defensive techniques, and customer service.

-- National Guard: The National Guard requires significant training in basic marksmanship, as well as physical security features, to assist in their role as a peacetime infrastructure protection force. National Guard officers require instruction in the areas critical to managing a facility security program, such as establishing access control policies, site surveys, developing emergency response procedures and managing and conducting response drills.

-- Gendarmerie: Gendarmes require training in effective border patrol techniques, such as grid searches and mounted tracking, as well as advanced field interview techniques. Due to their role as a front-line counter-terrorism force, tactical marksmanship skills and off-road emergency response driving are also a high priority

-- BASEP (Presidential Security Battalion): As the events of the August 6th Coup prove, BASEP is effectively a pawn of the military junta. Any democratically-elected leader following this period will have an immediate need for a reliable, adaptable, non-military protection unit. This unit will vary in size and require training in a full array of executive protection skills; site advances, protective formation, motorcade operations, etc.

16. (U) Host Country Willingness to Accept Assistance: Although Post currently maintains a policy of limited, direct engagement with host country, we still enjoy excellent relations with security forces. The military junta has made it clear that it welcomes United States assistance in these areas, as has deposed President Abdallahi. Past assistance, provided prior to the August 6th Coup, showed an excellent response from both senior level members of security forces, as well as rank and file officers.

17. (U) Other Efforts by International Partners: Although Post has not partnered with foreign governments in the past, when providing this sort of assistance, several other nations have provided training and equipment. France, notably, has fully re-engaged Mauritania with regard to counter-terrorism assistance within the past month.

18. (U) Regional Training Centers: Currently, there are no regional training centers, operated either by the United States or a foreign government, within Mauritania. However, in the past, Mauritanian security officers were frequently the recipients of such training in neighboring countries, as well as the United States. Post has identified several existing facilities, such as the National Police Academy (ENP), that could, with adequate support, be built into such a center, serving all Mauritanian, non-military security services, as well as those of other nations.

19. (U) Embassy Contacts: Events set in motion by the military junta following the August 6th Coup have seen almost all of American Embassy Nouakchott's higher level contacts reassigned to less operational roles in the nation's security services. Although Post still enjoys excellent relations with host country security forces, any new initiatives, put forward while the military junta retains power, would have to be very carefully tailored to the political realities of post-coup Mauritania.

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